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THE COMPLICATED PROBLEM OF THE YELLOWSTONE ELK

Since our early winter bulletin detailing the plight of the Yellowstone elk herds resulting from the abnormal snows of the autumn and the greed of Montana meat-hunters, the northern herd has again faced starvation and again survived. One of the most extraordinary winters in the history of the region is over at last.

The early storms were succeeded by favorable weather conditions and the northern herd slowly returned to the park, where, during the winter, they were maintained by hay which had been bought with money appropriated by Congress, under a general deficiency act. It cost about \$38,000 to meet the emergency. The southern herd, meantime, had been carried through by appropriations diverted from other uses by the Biological Survey.

All now would have been well had not this unseemly winter wound up in the way it began. Late snowstorms of unseasonable depth again sent the northern herd far afield in search of slopes where dried grass could be reached by pawing up snow of lesser depth. Again hay had to be purchased in a hurry, this time with money contributed entirely by patriotic citizens. About \$5,000 was required to meet the new emergency, and the last of the hay available in neighborhood ranches was fortunately secured. Contributions sent through the National Parks Association helped.

The winter plight of the elk has occasioned concentrations which afforded opportunity for estimating their number with an accuracy not possible for many years. Together, the Yellowstone herds number about 40,000 instead of 30,000 as formerly supposed.

These herds present a many-sided problem of which their feeding in occasional emergencies like last winter's is the smallest part. The nation's elk increase rapidly, and can not be kept always within the bounds of the national park and certain outlying lands. Neighborhood

ranching interests also are increasing, and cattle more and more compete with the elk for certain grazing privileges. Both have their rights, and the determination of these presently will become no small matter.

These elk herds constitute the noblest wild animal exhibit in America, and, within civilization, in the world. They must be maintained for posterity at any cost, and this means an ample natural range within or without the park boundaries. Just what this range shall be and how great the herds which shall occupy it is no easy part of the problem, which involves also other considerations of difficulty.

The solution of the problem, too, must render definitely impossible these hideous slaughters which, insulting every principle of sportsmanship and common decency, every few years shock the whole nation. Doubtless the elk herds must be kept within limits of size which a reasonable range will support, but they can not continue to be cut down in the manner which many hundreds of Montana meat-hunters, aided by inadequate State laws, employed last fall.

ROBERT STERLING YARD,

Executive Secretary.